

Barrier Analysis Team

Final Report

FY 2019



Report on barriers pertaining to recruitment, hiring, and retention of women, minorities and persons with disabilities along with recommendations to remove the barriers.

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Executive Summary

Background and Definitions

For the third year in a row, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) established a Barrier Analysis Team (BAT) to conduct an in-depth examination of barriers pertaining to recruitment, hiring, and retention of women, minorities and persons with disabilities. The members of the BAT include Regional and HQ staff. The team analyzed workforce tables, complaints data, Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) results, exit survey responses, and focus group data.

The BAT attempted to identify the underlying causal factors (or barriers) that could contribute to the identified triggers. A trigger is an observed or measurable trend, disparity, or anomaly that suggests the need for an inquiry into an employment policy, practice, procedure, or condition. A barrier is any employment policy, procedure, practice, or condition that effectively limits employment opportunities for individuals of a particular race, ethnic background, gender, or for persons with disabilities. In addition, some workforce data triggers in this report are defined in terms of participation rate, which is the number of employees currently working as a % of the employee population.

The FY 2019 BAT made substantive progress on implementing previous recommendations and developing strategies for barrier elimination, focusing on: 1) Communications; 2) Employee resource groups (ERGs); 3) Training; and 4) Onboarding.

Leadership Direction for FY 2019 BAT

The Executive Diversity Committee (EDC) provided guidance for the FY 2019 BAT that highlighted the need to:

- Ensure BAT is maximizing efficiency by working in collaboration with others in the Service that may be working on similar or overlapping projects.
- Increase the focus of the barrier analysis process on barrier removal.
- Address recommendations made by the FY 2018 BAT in the areas of Communications and ERGs.

Barrier Analysis Findings

Triggers were identified indicating disparities for women, minorities, and persons with disabilities across the employee life cycle (e.g., workforce participation, hiring, promotions and separations).

Triggers

The prominent triggers identified by the FY 2019 BAT are provided below in Table 1.

Table 1. Prominent triggers identified by the FY 2019 BAT.

Source	Trigger
Workforce data tables	A review of FY 2019 permanent workforce data reveals: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lower participation rates of minority racial and ethnic groups combined (17.5%) and women (40.3%) in the permanent workforce in comparison to rates in the Organizational

	<p>Civilian Labor Force (CLF) (21.1% and 45.4%, respectively).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower participation rates of Asian females, Asian males, Black or African American females, Black or African American males and Hispanic or Latina females in the permanent workforce in comparison to rates in the Organizational Civilian Labor Force. • Declining participation by all non-white racial/ethnic groups and by women with increasing GS Grade level. • Lower hiring rates of Asian females, Asian males, Black or African American males, Hispanic or Latina females and Hispanic or Latino males into the permanent workforce in comparison to rates in the Organizational Civilian Labor Force.
<i>Complaints data</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trends in the bases for discrimination complaints have shifted across FY12 to FY19 but the same categories tend to rise to the top of most frequently filed complaints. In FY17, disability was the most frequent basis of discrimination, with reprisal and sex being second and third. Reprisal was the most frequent basis of alleged discrimination in FY 2018 and FY19. Discrimination based on disability, sex, and age were among the top three bases in these most recent FYs. • Harassment remains the most pervasive source of complaints in the FWS. Consistent with previous years, non-sexual harassment is the number one issue raised in FWS complaints. One complaint of sexual harassment based on sex (female) and 11 of non-sexual harassment were made in FY2019. The bases for non-sexual harassment complaints included reprisal (n=8), age (n=5), mental disability (n=3), sex - female (n=2), sex - male (n=1), and physical disability (n=1).
<i>Grievance data</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-harassment (PB 18-01) grievances are the most common type of grievance in the Service. In the past four years, the number of anti-harassment grievances peaked at 23 in 2018 and declined to 7 in 2019.
<i>Findings from decisions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No findings of discrimination from EEOC in FY 2019. Please read <i>Complaints data</i> section for triggers related to EEO complaints data.
<i>Federal employee viewpoint survey (FEVS)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Results from the FEVS New Inclusion Quotient index strongly indicate that majority (white) and minority (females, persons with disabilities, Hispanic/Latino, non-white, etc.) groups have different experiences of inclusion in the workplace. • Minority groups had consistently lower New IQ scores from 2010 to 2019 with few exceptions. Additionally, in 2019 most minority groups had lower scores on all of the New IQ sub-indices, again with a few exceptions. The extent of the differences varies within and across majority and minority groups. • Across all groups, the Fairness sub-index had the lowest scores. The score for all FWS responses was 54.5, meaning that a little over half of respondents rated the items in the Fair sub-index positively. There were four minority groups that had scores lower than 50: persons with disabilities (48.3), Indian or Alaska Natives (45.7), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (47.6), and employees of two or more races (49.1). • Differences exist between male and female employees. From 2010 to 2019 New IQ scores for females were lower than males every year except 2013 when they were equal. Scores for males and females were at their highest in the last 3 years. In 2019, the greatest difference on sub-index scores was for Fair (3.4 less for females) and Open (1.9 less).
<i>Exit survey data</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and minority racial and ethnic groups reported negative reasons for leaving the FWS workforce almost double the rates of men and white employees in exit interviews.

	<p>Taken together, these triggers indicate that substantial barriers remain for minorities and persons with disabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the 61 respondents who identified as female, 27 (44%) reported negative reasons for leaving the Service, including: work related stress, problems with management, bullying, lack of accommodations for disabilities, hostile work environment, and safety issues. Seven (11%) specifically mention harassment a factor in their decision for leaving. Of the 68 respondents, who identified as male, 15 (24%) report negative reasons for leaving.
<i>Focus group and interviews</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants had a lack of knowledge regarding basic concepts related to the Schedule A hiring authority for persons with disabilities, and they mentioned that this lack of knowledge was widespread. They perceived that their supervisors did not have answers, and that guidance and advice was inconsistent, varying depending on the person offering assistance.
<i>Other reports</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived fairness in development, evaluation, and promotion practices predicted intent to stay. Transparency of development, evaluation, and promotion practices and metrics around D&I would increase intent to stay. • People of Color (POC) have lower levels of perceived fairness around development, evaluation, and promotion practices and, therefore, lower intent to stay than non-POC. <p><i>Source:</i> Johnson S.K. 2019. Leaking Talent – How People of Color are Pushed Out of Environmental Organizations. Somewhat useful data, has ideas on practices to employ to increase retention. Supports having unconscious bias training and diversity goals.</p>

The FY 2019 BAT recommends that future Barrier Analysis Teams expand their trigger identification efforts to include more randomized focus groups with employees as well as a review of DOI Talent Performance Appraisal data.

Barriers

The barriers identified by the previous two Barrier Analysis Teams are provided below in Table 2, in addition to a new barrier identified by the FY19 team.

Table 2. Barriers identified by BATs from FY17-FY19. The FY 2019 BAT identified one additional barrier, adding to the list of already existing barriers identified.

Year Identified	Barrier
<i>FY 2017</i>	<u>Resistance in Organizational Culture:</u> Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) are facing resistance from the existing organizational culture. Misinformation, perceptions and resistance to the perspective of others have not been addressed, and are undermining or limiting the effectiveness of D&I initiatives. D&I initiatives also face resistance due to perceived unintended consequences related to equal employment opportunity mandates.
<i>FY 2017</i>	<u>Perception of Unfairness in Career Growth Opportunities:</u> Women, minorities, and persons with disabilities perceive a lack of fairness throughout their employment cycle at FWS.
<i>FY 2017</i>	<u>Inconsistent and decentralized recruitment and selection:</u> Inconsistent and decentralized recruitment and selection practices have negatively influenced the ability of FWS to meet

	its D&I goals and effectively shape its workforce.
<i>FY 2018</i>	<u>Inconsistent Employee Communications</u> : A history of inconsistent and disconnected communications on the D&I strategy and core values is inhibiting FWS-wide understanding and buy-in.
<i>FY 2019</i>	<u>Insufficient knowledge among workforce regarding concepts relevant to supporting Persons with Disabilities (PWD)</u> : The workforce has insufficient knowledge in fundamental concepts related to the hiring, development, and retention of PWD, such as the Schedule A hiring authority and reasonable accommodations. This, along with deficiencies in other employee life cycle areas that affect all employees, such as onboarding, is leading to employees with disabilities feeling like they are not valued.

Barrier Elimination: Actions Taken and Recommended Next Steps

In collaboration with others across the Service, the BAT took action and provided recommendations to address and eliminate barriers in four key areas. Two of these areas were identified by the FY 2018 BAT (Communications and Employee resource groups (ERGs)) and two were identified by the FY 2019 BAT (Training and Onboarding).

Barrier Elimination Areas Identified by Previous BAT

Communications

Actions taken:

- During the BAT's initial workshop in May 2019, BAT members assessed current perceptions of D&I communications and identified this as an area where the Service needs improvement - reiterating findings by the FY 2018 BAT.
- In coordination with the Chair of Service's Executive Diversity Committee (EDC), the BAT determined that before establishing talking points about each area under the D&I umbrella, Service leadership needed to be aligned on the basics of why we need D&I, how we are going to get there, and what success will look like.
- The BAT participated in the crafting of high-level messages explaining the why, what, how and when of the Service's approach to D&I. These align with the discussions that took place among the four Directorate work groups at their November 2019 meeting. These high-level messages are the starting point for an adapted Service-wide discussion on D&I.
- Each Region and Program has submitted a communication plan outlining how they plan to roll out the new "why, what, how" D&I messages.

Recommended next steps:

Provide phase two of Communications template to the Regions/Programs by **October 30, 2020**. (Lead: EA; Support: EDC, ODIWM, Management & Administration).

- Identify successful employee engagement actions that have been taken at the Region/Program level as part of their communication plans and include no more than two for Service-wide implementation in FY 2021.
- Increase capacity to support facilitation of open dialogue / high-sensitivity D&I discussions among Service leaders and employees. E.g. Internal and External Partners (CADR, contract, etc.).

- Develop messaging to connect employee feedback (e.g. exit survey, climate survey) to leadership actions.
- PWD Barrier: Develop messaging for PWD that speak directly to PWD directly and with transparency about:
 - What the data says about their experience.
 - How improvement of their experience fits within the DIIP.
 - Outline the actions that improve the knowledge barrier (e.g. reinforce information on Reasonable Accommodations).
 - Increase access and awareness of available training by developing a single repository for all D&I training, as well as utilizing the new intranet.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Actions taken:

- The BAT completed a study on the benefits of ERGs for organizations and for employees, focusing on the possible benefits of ERG implementation in the Service and recommendations on how to proceed with crafting an ERG strategy.
 - The BAT's study of literature strongly supports the notion that participation in ERGs results in positive outcomes for employees. A number of studies confirm that participation in ERGs is associated with improved feelings of social inclusion and sense of community. In many cases, ERGs have been instrumental in achieving concrete improvements to workplace conditions and have thereby helped management address issues related to diversity.
 - The benefits of ERGs to employees confer benefits to the organization as a whole. ERGs have been found to increase employee performance, recruitment, and retention. In addition, ERGs provide opportunities for leadership development within an organization.
 - The BAT found a patchwork of participation across the Service in active groups that can be either semi-formal Service-specific groups or formal national groups. FWS Pride is an example of a semi-formal group that has made substantial gains in membership in the past year. However, there are currently no FWS-specific ERGs formally recognized by DOI. Other bureaus within DOI have bureau-specific ERGs (e.g., the National Park Service has 6, USGS has 5). FWS Pride is planning to apply for formal DOI recognition this year.
- Recommendations from this analysis were included in the FY 2020 DIIP Work Plan which calls for the appointment of an ERG Lead as well as an ERG Coordinator to increase awareness of ERGs and craft an ERG strategy for FY 2021 roll out.

Recommended next steps:

- Prepare a national ERG Initiative to be rolled out in FY 2021. Activities to include: review existing policy/guidance (DOI PB 17-07), seek input from existing DOI ERG programs in other Bureaus, and develop guidance for FWS employees who wish to start an ERG, among others.
- Ensure ERG strategy is visibly supported by leadership while remaining a grassroots employee-led effort.

- Involve ERG members in events surrounding commemorative heritage events/months from the start of the ERG effort (the FWS Pride ERG is already taking a lead role in developing content for the June 2020 Pride Month commemoration).
- Create a toolkit for future ERGs with at least three items: 1) DOI ERG Guidance 2) the Service ERG strategy, and 3) a sample charter/bylaws document.
- Establish a vehicle for virtual information and best practice sharing between Service ERGs.

Barrier Elimination Areas Identified by FY 2019 BAT

Training

Actions taken:

- The BAT assessed current D&I training offerings by reviewing DOI Talent and intranet pages (Fishnet, Google, and SharePoint), and by speaking with staff at ODIWM and NCTC.
- The BAT identified lack of a single repository for all D&I trainings as a challenge to D&I competency. Subsequent to the BAT finishing their work on training, the BAT learned that ODIWM recently launched a website in the intranet to advertise D&I training offerings. This might meet the need but the BAT is unsure if there is enough awareness about the new tool.
- The BAT conducted a focus group with Persons with Disabilities (PWD) which included a conversation on training. The National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) is described as a hard place to get to, and to navigate once there, for persons with certain disabilities. Participants wondered if more local training could be available. Even when participants had the opportunity to be teleconferenced into training at NCTC, they felt a barrier to engagement with trainers and other participants that would be conducive to growth in a meaningful way.

Recommended next steps:

- Increase access and awareness of available training by developing a single repository for all D&I training, as well as utilizing the new intranet.
 - More clearly define for employees how a course qualifies for EEO versus D&I training.
- Develop Service-specific training on interrupting bias. Old-format sensitivity-type trainings are unlikely to work and can make matters worse. The Service should pilot and measure the impact of new approaches to training on interrupting bias and improving our collective inclusiveness intelligence.
- Develop Service-specific training on disability rights and responsibilities for supervisors and employees.
- Improve D&I training impact assessment. In the current state, the Service is mostly measuring attendance, compliance, satisfaction, and reaction. The next step is to measure how much information was absorbed and how much training has influenced the behavior of participants on the job.

Onboarding

Actions taken:

- During the BAT's initial workshop in May 2019, the team identified lack of a national onboarding protocol or centralized platform for employee integration resources as a limiting factor to new employee engagement and retention.
- The BAT worked with the Deputies Group, the JAO and NCTC to develop a checklist of helpful resources for new employees and hiring managers and outline next steps in developing a national employee onboarding platform as identified in the FY 2020 DIIP Work Plan.
 - The Employee Onboarding & Integration Project team has developed a project plan to produce high quality deliverables to complement our current recruitment, hiring and retention practices.
 - This team is also compiling all previous onboarding projects to date, including ones that BAT has helped work on as part of their team efforts.

Recommended next steps:



- Continue to work with the Deputies Group, the JAO and NCTC to develop a platform to host helpful onboarding resources for new employees and hiring managers.
- Expand platform over time to include resources for all aspects of the employee engagement lifecycle (recruit, hire, onboard/develop, engage/retain).
- Hold focus groups or conduct a survey of converted DFP Fellows, Schedule A hires, and general subsection of new employees at their 6-month mark and one year anniversary in order to glean fresh information on improvements to our onboarding practices.
- Review exit interview surveys to see if issues raised during separations can be addressed during the employees' initial onboarding experience.

Priority Recommendations and Conclusions

The FWS workforce of the future will be shaped by who applies for positions, who is hired, who is retained, and who remains engaged. While we are currently not meeting numerous CLF benchmarks for women, and several racial and ethnic minority groups, and persons with disabilities; there is great potential for eventually reaching these benchmarks if we continue to push forward assertively with all aspects of barrier elimination.

The FY 2019 BAT prioritized recommendations in two areas: 1) Communications and 2) Exit Survey. The BAT considers action items in those areas to be high impact. This section provides the Executive Diversity Committee (EDC) guidance on what the BAT believes the Service should do next as the FY 2021 DIIP Work Plan is created. The legend below explains the symbols found in the priority recommendations tables.

Legend

<u>Barriers</u>		<u>Impact</u>	
1	Resistance in Organizational Culture		Low Effort, High Impact
2	Career Growth Opportunities		High Effort, High Impact
3	Recruitment and Selection		
4	Employee Communications		
5	Persons with Disabilities(PWD)		

Communications (Recommendation One)

Provide phase two of Communications template to the Regions/Programs by **October 30, 2020**. (Lead: EA; Support: EDC, ODIWM, Management & Administration).

Description:

In FY 2020, the Service launched its first concerted effort around D&I communications. As a result, each Region and Program generated their own communication action plan including D&I and employee engagement activities. The plans also included standard talking points on why we need D&I, how we are going to achieve our D&I goals, and what success looks like. However, one communications push alone will not significantly transform D&I communications nor will it transform our work culture. The BAT recommends the Service stay the course on improving communications with the ultimate goal of achieving national coordination and increased guidance to Regions/Programs around D&I activities and communications. An incremental phased approach is the best way to get there. Therefore, the BAT recommends the Service roll out a phase two of its communications template to the Regions/Programs as part of the FY 2021 DIIP Work Plan. Phase two should start to shift the messaging towards talking points tailored to specific employee segments and specific areas of D&I. For example, emphasizing the role of PWD in D&I efforts and highlighting the leadership actions that have been taken.

Strategic Activity	Responsible Parties	Action Items	Barriers /Impact	Due Date
1.1 Develop Messaging	Lead: EA Support: Management & Administration ODIWM	Develop messaging for PWD that speak directly to PWD directly and with transparency about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What the data says about their experience. How improvement of their experience fits within the DIIP. Outline the actions that improve the knowledge barrier (e.g. reinforce information on Reasonable Accommodations). Increase access and awareness of available training by developing a single repository for all D&I training, as well as utilizing the new intranet. 	1 4 5	September 2020
	Lead: EA Support: Management & Administration ODIWM	Develop messaging to connect employee feedback (e.g. exit survey, climate survey) to leadership actions.	1 4 5	September 2020
1.2 Step down key messages throughout the organization .	Lead: Workplace Culture Transformation Team (WCT) Support: ODIWM Management & Administration	Identify successful employee engagement actions that have been taken at the Region/Program level as part of their communication plans and include no more than two for Service-wide implementation in FY 2021.	1 4 	July 2020
1.3 Engage Service staff to become part of the solution.	EDC ODIWM NCTC WCT	Increase capacity to support facilitation of open dialogue / high-sensitivity D&I discussions among Service leaders and employees. E.g. Internal and External Partners (CADR, contract, etc.).	1 4 	January 2021

Exit Survey Data (Recommendation Two)

Review exit survey dissemination process by **August 31, 2020**. (Lead: Management & Administration).

Description:

The Service's Exit Survey has a low participation rate relative to the available pool of departing employees. The BAT found that the survey needs to be better promoted. The Exit Survey underwent a change in platforms (from Google to Microsoft). The BAT recommends that Management and Administration update all exit clearance procedures to reflect that change and develop a process for Directorate members to receive their corresponding data sets on a regular basis.

Strategic Activity	Responsible Parties	Action Items	Due Date
1.1 Review exit survey dissemination process	Management & Administration	Ensure updated survey link is included in all exit clearance procedures.	August 2020
		Ensure Service leadership has regular access to data.	August 2020

Data Analysis and Trigger Identification

Workforce Data Tables

Description of the Data

The Service workforce data tables were analyzed for FY2019. These tables included data on the current Service workforce, recent hires, separations, promotions, and awards shown by race, ethnicity, and sex. Demographic information for the Service workforce was analyzed by legacy region, General Schedule (GS) level, Wage Grade (WG) level, occupational category (officials and managers, professionals, technicians, sales workers, administrative support workers, craft workers, operatives, laborers and helpers, and service workers), and major occupation (general natural resources management and biological sciences, biological science technician, fish and wildlife administration, fish biology, wildlife refuge management, wildlife biology, criminal investigating, and law enforcement). The dataset included benchmarks based on the Organizational Civilian Labor Force (CLF), which is used to highlight demographic differences in race, ethnicity, and sex between occupation types. The CLF is based on the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) national availability data for relevant occupations from the 2010 Census. The Organizational CLF is based on the CLF information, but is corrected for differences in the proportion of workers within occupational categories between the national workforce and the Service workforce (see Supplementary Materials for more details on how the Organizational CLF is calculated).

Key Results

- 1) The participation rates of all minority racial and ethnic groups (combined) and women (combined) in the total FWS permanent workforce are lower than expected.
 - A review of FY 2019 permanent workforce data (Figure 1) reveals lower participation rates of minority racial and ethnic groups combined (17.5%) and women (40.3%) in the permanent workforce in comparison to rates in the Organizational CLF (21.1% and 45.4%, respectively).
- 2) The participation rate of Asians in the total FWS permanent workforce is lower than expected.
 - A review of FY 2019 permanent workforce data (Figure 1) reveals a lower participation rate of Asian females (1.5%) and Asian males (1.3%) in the permanent workforce in comparison to rates in the Organizational CLF (3.1% and 2.7%, respectively).
- 3) The participation rate of Blacks or African Americans in the total FWS permanent workforce is lower than expected.
 - A review of FY 2019 permanent workforce data (Figure 1) reveals a lower participation rate of Black or African American females (2.6%) and Black or African American males (2.0%) in the permanent workforce in comparison to rates in the Organizational CLF (3.5% and 3.3%, respectively).
- 4) The participation rate of Hispanic or Latina females in the total FWS permanent workforce is lower than expected.
 - A review of FY 2019 permanent workforce data (Figure 1) reveals a lower participation rate of Hispanic or Latina females (2.6%) in the permanent workforce in comparison to the rate in the Organizational CLF (3.2%).

- 5) The participation rate of all minority racial and ethnic groups (combined) in the total FWS permanent workforce is particularly low in several FWS regions.
 - A review of FY 2019 permanent workforce data reveals a lower participation rate of all minority racial and ethnic groups (combined) in the permanent workforce in the following legacy regions: Region 3, Bloomington (7.4%); Region 1, Hadley (11.4%); Regions 5 & 7, Lakewood (11.5%); Regions 9 & 12, Portland (13.4%); and Region 10, Sacramento (15.2%) in comparison to the rate in the Organizational CLF (21.1%).
- 6) The participation rate of women in the total FWS permanent workforce is lower than expected in several FWS regions.
 - A review of FY 2019 permanent workforce data reveals a lower participation rate of women in the permanent workforce in Regions 6 & 8, Albuquerque (33.8%); Regions 2 & 4, Atlanta (34.7%); Regions 5 & 7, Lakewood (35.2%); Region 3, Bloomington (37.7%); Regions 9 & 12, Portland (40.7%); Region 11, Anchorage (41.1%); and Region 10, Sacramento (41.5%) in comparison to the rate in the Organizational CLF (45.4%).

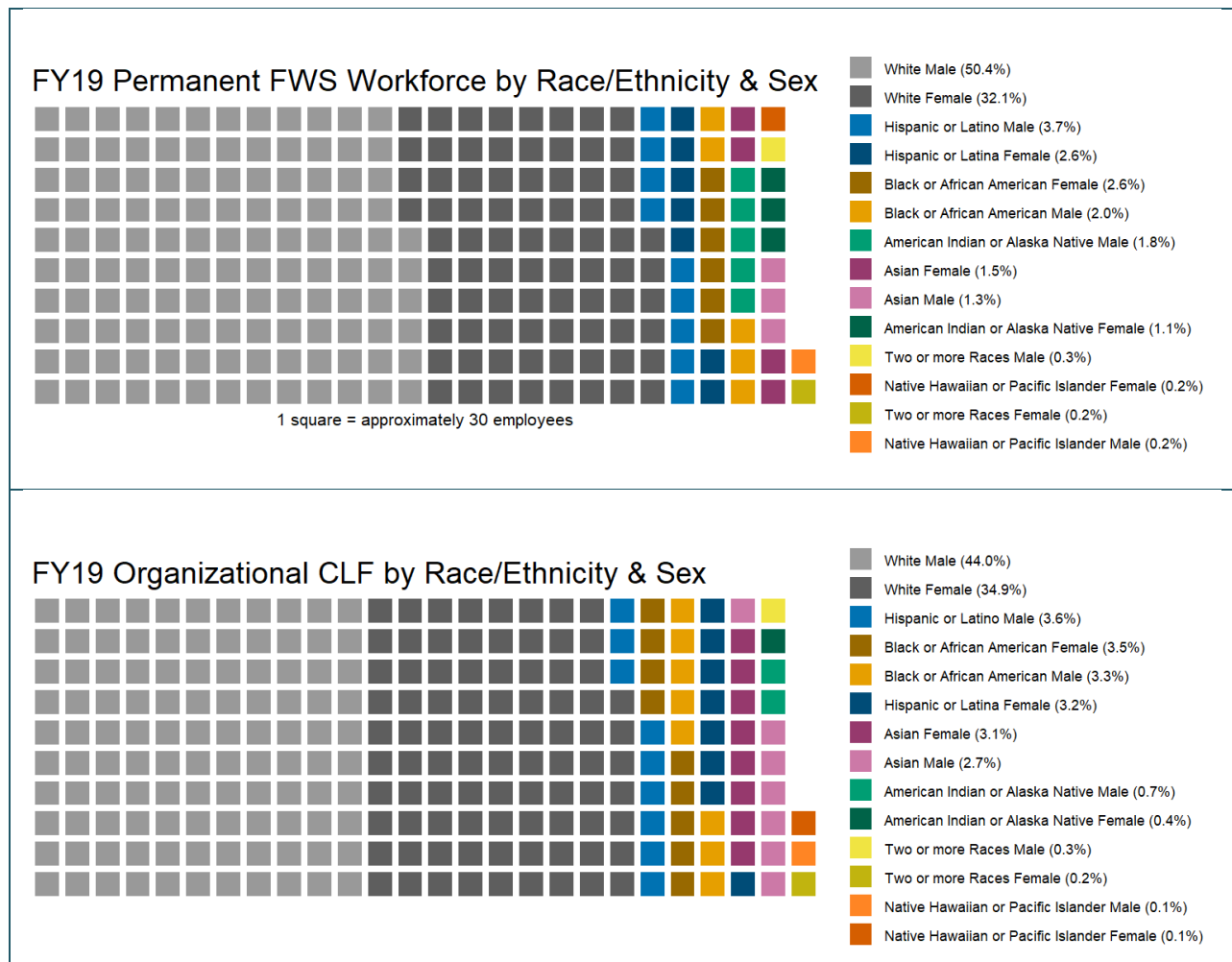


Figure 1. Fiscal Year 2019 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service permanent workforce (top) and the Fiscal Year 2019 Organization Civilian Labor Force (CLF) benchmark (bottom) by race/ethnicity and sex.

7) The participation rate of all non-white racial/ethnic groups (combined) declines with increasing General Schedule (GS) Grade Level.

- A review of FY 2019 permanent workforce data reveals declining participation by all non-white racial/ethnic groups with increasing GS Grade level (Table 3).

Racial/Ethnic Group	GS Grades 01-08	GS Grades 09-11	GS Grades 12-13	GS Grades 14/5 and SES
<i>American Indian or Alaska Native</i>	3.4%	3.1%	2.4%	2.3%
<i>Asian</i>	3.9%	3.1%	2.8%	1.5%
<i>Black or African American</i>	7.4%	4.5%	4.5%	4.0%
<i>Hispanic or Latino/Latina</i>	8.8%	7.0%	5.6%	4.8%
<i>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</i>	0.8%	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%
<i>Two or More Races</i>	0.8%	0.6%	0.5%	0.0%
<i>White</i>	75.0%	81.3%	84.0%	86.9%
<i>Total Non-white</i>	25.0%	18.7%	16.0%	13.1%

Table 3. Participation rate for racial/ethnic groups by General Schedule (GS) Grade Level.

8) The participation rate of women declines with increasing General Schedule (GS) Grade Level.

- A review of FY 2019 permanent workforce data reveals declining participation by women with increasing GS Grade level: Grades 01-08 (53%), Grades 09-11: (45.0%), Grades 12-13 (40.5%) and Grades 14-15/SES (36.0%).

9) The hiring rate of Hispanics or Latinos into the FWS permanent workforce is lower than expected.

- A review of FY 2019 hiring data reveals lower hiring rates of Hispanic or Latino females (1.2%) and Hispanic or Latino males (2.9%) into the permanent workforce in comparison to rates in the Organizational CLF (3.2% and 3.6%, respectively).

10) The hiring rate of Asians into the FWS permanent workforce is lower than expected.

- A review of FY 2019 hiring data reveals lower hiring rates of Asian females (2.7%) and Asian males (0.6%) into the permanent workforce in comparison to rates in the Organizational CLF (3.1% and 2.7%, respectively).

11) The hiring rate of Black or African American males into the FWS permanent workforce is lower than expected.

- A review of FY 2019 hiring data reveals a lower hiring rate of Black or African American Males (2.7%) into the permanent workforce in comparison to the rate in the Organizational CLF (3.3%).

12) Selection for internal competitive promotions is lower for several groups than expected.

- A review of FY 2019 promotion data reveals lower rates of selection for internal competitive promotions for Black or African American Males (0%), Asian Males (2.2%), and American Indian or Alaska Native Males (1.3%) in comparison to the selection rate across the total FWS workforce (3.5%).

13) Selection for internal senior level positions is lower for several groups than expected.

- A review of FY 2019 promotion data reveals lower rates of selection for internal senior level positions for Black or African American Males (1.4%), Asian Males (0%), American Indian or Alaska Native Males (1.7%), and American Indian or Alaska Native Females (0%) in comparison to the selection rate across the total FWS workforce (3.0%).

14) The voluntary separation rate is higher for several groups than expected.

- A review of FY 2019 separation data reveals higher rates of voluntary separation for Hispanic or Latina Females (9.2%), Black or African American Females (11.8%), Asian Females (11.1%), American Indian or Alaska Native Males (11.0%), American Indian or Alaska Native Females (9.3%), and Multiracial Males (13.6%) in comparison to the voluntary separation rate across the total FWS workforce (7.9%).

Complaint Data

Description of the data

Complaints data was summarized and subsequently reviewed to determine if there were patterns or trends in the number of complaints filed, bases for complaints, and frequency at which pre-complaints became formal complaints. A review of data from FY19 Annual Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Statistical Report of Discrimination Complaints (462 report), FY18 DOI Annual EEO Complaints Processing Report, and FY18 MD-715 Report provided insight into areas where progress seems evident as well as areas for potential improvement.

Key Results

- 1) The number of formal complaints was fairly consistent from FY12 to FY19, with the most significant decrease in FY 2018. The percentage of individuals proceeding from a pre-complaint to a formal complaint decreased significantly in FY18 compared to the previous six fiscal years, with only 16 of 44 (36%) pre-complainants ending in a formal complaint. This metric remains similar for FY19. Of the 46 completed pre-complaints in FY19, 22 resulted in filing a formal complaint. The other 24 were pending a decision to file a complaint, pending counseling, settled, withdrawn, or resolved through counseling.
- 2) Trends in the bases for discrimination complaints have shifted across FY12 to FY19 but the same categories were elevated to the most frequently filed complaints. In FY17, disability was the most frequent basis of discrimination, with reprisal and sex being second and third. Reprisal was the most frequent basis of alleged discrimination in FY 2018 and FY19. Discrimination based on disability, sex, and age were among the top three bases in recent fiscal years.
- 3) Harassment remains the most pervasive source of complaints in the FWS. Consistent with previous years, non-sexual harassment is the number one issue raised in FWS complaints (Table 3). One complaint of sexual harassment based on sex (female) and 11 of non-sexual harassment were made in FY2019. The bases for non-sexual harassment complaints included reprisal (n=8), age (n=5), mental disability (n=3), sex - female (n=2), sex - male (n=1), and physical disability (n=1). The number of harassments has remained largely unchanged during the past 8 years.
- 4) In addition to harassment, multiple discrimination allegations were filed for issues regarding disciplinary action (n=3) and reasonable accommodation disability (n=2). Issues resulting in a single charge of discrimination (n=1) included: appointment/hire, performance evaluation/appraisal, promotion/non-selection, reassignment, termination, and terms/conditions of employment.
- 5) Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) could be a driver for fewer pre-complaints to formal complaints. Employees who enter the EEO process are given the choice of traditional EEO counseling or Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) when appropriate. High participation in ADR started in 2018 (57%) and continued in 2019 (53%); the previous level of participation was <30%. The decline in the number of pre-complaints ending in formal complaints also declined starting in 2018, which could be attributed to implementation and marketing of the ADR process.

Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS)

Description of the Data

The New Inclusion Quotient (New IQ) Index and harassing conduct questions from the 2019 U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) were analyzed. FEVS is administered as a census that includes all eligible permanently employed, non-political, non-seasonal, full- and part-time employees. Of the 7,077 FWS surveys administered, 4,359 employees completed surveys for a response rate of 62%. The analyses compared responses for majority and minority groups for sex, race, ethnicity, and disability status.

The New IQ was built on the concept that individual behaviors, repeat over time, form the habits that create the essential building blocks of an inclusive environment. The New IQ consists of 20 items that measure workplace inclusiveness. These 20 items are grouped into five sub-indices described as the “5 Habits of Inclusion”: Fair, Open, Cooperative, Supportive, and Empowering. Our analyses included comparisons of majority and minority groups’ New IQ scores from 2010 to 2019; sub-indices scores for 2019; and percent negative, neutral, and positive responses for the 20 survey items.

In 2019, six questions regarding harassing conduct were included in the FWS FEVS for the first time. Analyses of harassing conduct questions included response rates for each question and a comparison of majority and minority groups’ responses by question.

Key Results

Overall trends in the data suggest that minority groups experience the workplace environment as less inclusive than majority groups. The same is true for how minority groups experience harassing conduct and beliefs about how the FWS will respond to instances of harassing conduct. Results 1-7 relate to workplace inclusion and 8-11 to harassing conduct.

- 1) Minority groups had consistently lower New IQ scores from 2010 to 2019 with few exceptions (see Supplementary Materials pages 83-84). Additionally, in 2019 most minority groups had lower scores on all of the New IQ sub-indices, again with a few exceptions. The extent of the differences varies within and across majority and minority groups (see Supplementary Materials 2019 U.S. Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, pages 85-86).
- 2) Across all groups, the Fair sub-index had the lowest scores. The score for all FWS responses was 54.5, meaning that a little over half of respondents rated the items in the Fair sub-index positively. There were four minority groups that had scores lower than 50: people with disabilities (48.3), Indian or Alaska Natives (45.7), Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (47.6), and employees of two or more races (49.1).
- 3) Differences exist between male and female employees. From 2010 to 2019 New IQ scores for females were lower than males every year except 2013 when they were equal. Scores for males and females were at their highest in the last 3 years. In 2019, the greatest difference on sub-index scores was for Fair (3.4 less for females) and Open (1.9 less). The items with the greatest statistically significant difference in the percent of positive responses for females were:
 - a. Empowering Q2: I have enough information to do my job well. (5.9% less)
 - b. Fair Q24: In my work unit, differences in performance are recognized in a meaningful way. (6% less)

- c. Open Q34: Policies and programs promote diversity in the workplace (for example, recruiting minorities and women, training in awareness of diversity issues, mentoring). (5.2% less)
- 4) Differences exist between people with disabilities and people without disabilities. From 2010 to 2019 New IQ scores for people with disabilities were lower than people without disabilities, with the distance growing greater in the past three years. In 2019, the greatest difference on sub-index scores was for Empowering (9 less for people with disabilities) and Fair (7.5 less). The items with the greatest statistically significant difference in the percent of positive responses for people with disabilities were:
 - a. Fair Q38: Prohibited Personnel Practices (for example, illegally discriminating for or against any employee/applicant, obstructing a person's right to compete for employment, knowingly violating veterans' preference requirements) are not tolerated. (14.1% less)
 - b. Empowering Q3: I feel encouraged to come up with new and better ways of doing things. (12.3% less)
 - c. Empowering Q2: I have enough information to do my job well. (12.2% less)
- 5) Differences exist between Hispanic or Latino employees and non-Hispanic/Latino employees. In all but 2 years from 2010 to 2019, New IQ scores for Hispanic/Latino employees were lower than non-Hispanic/Latino. Scores for both groups were at their highest in the last 3 years. In 2019, the greatest difference on sub-index scores was for Open (5.9 less for Hispanic/Latino employees) and Supportive (3.5 less). The items with the greatest statistically significant difference in the percent of positive responses for people with disabilities were:
 - a. Open Q45: My supervisor is committed to a workforce representative of all segments of society. (8.2% less)
 - b. Open Q55: Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds. (7% less)
 - c. Fair Q38: Prohibited Personnel Practices (for example, illegally discriminating for or against any employee/applicant, obstructing a person's right to compete for employment, knowingly violating veterans' preference requirements) are not tolerated. (5.7% less)
- 6) Differences exist between non-white racial groups and white employees. From 2010 to 2019 the relationship between non-white and white employees' New IQ scores varied. New IQ index and sub-index scores for 2019 reveal some large differences:
 - a. Black or African American employees had a higher New IQ score than white employees by 1 point. The Open index score was the only one lower for Black or African American employees than white employees (10 less).
 - b. Indian or Alaska Native employees had a New IQ score that was 13 points lower than white employees. The Supportive index had the greatest negative difference compared to white employees (18 less), followed by Open (16 less), Empowering (13 less), Fair (10 less), and Cooperative (5 less).
 - c. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander employees had a New IQ score that was 11 points lower than white employees. The Open index had the greatest negative

difference compared to white employees (25 less), followed by Supportive (12 less), Empowering (9 less), Fair (8 less), and Cooperative (3 less).

- d. Asian employees had a New IQ score that was 3 points lower than white employees. The Open index had the greatest negative difference compared to white employees (6 less), followed by Supportive (4 less), Empowering (2 less), Fair (<1 less), and Cooperative (<1 less).
 - e. Employees who identified as two or more races had a New IQ score that was 5 points lower than white employees. The Empowering index had the greatest negative difference compared to white employees (10 less), followed by Open (9 less), Fair (7 less), and Supportive (<1 less). Employees of two or more races had a slightly (less than 1 point higher) score for the Cooperative index.
- 7) The New IQ index items with consistently larger differences in the percent of positive responses across non-white groups, where non-white groups had lower positive responses were:
- a. Open Q34: Policies and programs promote diversity in the workplace (for example, recruiting minorities and women, training in awareness of diversity issues, mentoring).
 - b. Fair Q37: Arbitrary action, personal favoritism and coercion for partisan political purposes are not tolerated.
 - c. Open Q55: Supervisors work well with employees of different backgrounds.
 - d. Open Q45: My supervisor is committed to a workforce representative of all segments of society.
- 8) Statistically significant differences exist between male and female employees on two questions regarding harassing conduct:
- a. Q1: I have experienced or witnessed harassing conduct, as defined by Department of the Interior's Personnel Bulletin 18-01 (Prevention and Elimination of Harassing Conduct), in the last 12 months within my workplace. (7% more women responded yes)
 - b. Q4: If I do report an instance of harassing conduct, I believe my organization will take immediate action to stop the behavior and hold the offending employee(s) accountable. (12% fewer women responded agree or strongly agree)
- 9) Statistically significant differences exist between people with disabilities and people without disabilities on all questions regarding harassing conduct.
- 10) Statistically significant differences exist between Hispanic or Latino employees and non-Hispanic/Latino employees on all but one (Q2. I know where to report harassing conduct that I may experience or witness) of the questions regarding harassing conduct.
- 11) Statistically significant differences exist between non-white racial groups and white employees on all questions regarding harassing conduct.

Exit Survey Data

Description of the data

Exit interview responses received from October 2018 through July 2019 from 135 participants were reviewed. All personally identifiable information (PII) were redacted prior to the review to ensure confidentiality. Exit interviews are completed online by accessing an internal web-based survey form. The data was sorted to understand the baseline statistics related to gender, race, persons with disabilities, and how respondents answered each survey question (positive, negative, neutral). A goal was to understand the reasons for leaving and whether the data indicated any triggers and to compare the response rate percentages between a particular factor to the dominate factor. Four overarching categories were identified as to why employees leave the Service: 1) Workplace & Management Relations Issues (18.52%), 2) Career Opportunities (41.47%), 3) Retirement (22.22%), and 4) Personal Reasons other than Retirement (13.33%).

Key Results

- 1) Of the 61 respondents who identified as female, 27 (44%) reported negative reasons for leaving the Service, including: work related stress, problems with management, bullying, lack of accommodations for disabilities, hostile work environment, and safety issues. Seven (11%) specifically mention harassment a factor in their decision for leaving. Of the respondents, 68 identified as male. Of the 68 respondents, 15 (24%) report negative reasons for leaving.
- 2) Of the 23 respondents who identified as a minority, 10 (44%) report negative reasons for leaving the Service, including: work related stress, problems with management, affirmative action, fear of losing job, and unfairness. Of the 108 respondents who identified as white, 25 (19%) reported negative reasons for leaving.
- 3) Of the 25 respondents who identified as having a disability (two identified as persons with targeted disabilities), four (15%) noted that they experienced discrimination based on disability, combined with other discrimination based on age, race, reprisal, or non-merit factors.
- 4) A small sample size (135) related to the number of possible responses (at least 795) that the Service could have received were analyzed. Only 17% of exiting employees completed the survey. Some respondents did not answer demographic questions, resulting in blank fields and less accuracy, especially when tabulating demographic data.

Focus Group: Persons with Disabilities (PWD)

Description of the data

An all employee email message sent during September 2019 was used to gain voluntary engagement of Service employees who identify as persons with disabilities (PWD) and persons with targeted disabilities (PWTD) for a survey exclusively to gather information on workforce barriers. A randomly selected subset of those responding were surveyed and participated in a conference call focus group. Later in the study, the remaining volunteers were surveyed as well. The survey focused on volunteer engagement in areas that follow the lifecycle of employment, starting with the initial attraction to working with the Service through retirement. This allowed for better focus on areas where barriers to inclusive behavior and opportunities exist. These findings considered responses from over 50 employees. Although there were differences in how participants related their experiences and many have been well-received and afforded appropriate opportunities, there were enough examples shared that demonstrate a lack of respect and support for PWD/PWTD. The responses indicate that existing barriers are substantial and require changes in culture, attitudes, and understanding throughout the Service.

Key Results

While engaging with PWD and PWTD, the results show that the Service is not fully:

- 1) Supporting employees with essential work tools, career development, and opportunities;
- 2) Requiring adequate knowledge for supervisors to know and understand their responsibilities and expectations;
- 3) Following up to ensure that supervisors are implementing inclusive and fair practices, and;
- 4) Providing employees with easily accessible information to know and understand their rights and opportunities. Further, the results support the existence of barriers for PWD and PWTD in recruitment, selection, job support, and career growth.

Recruitment & Selection

- Participants were initially attracted to FWS by the conservation mission as well as by the National Wildlife Refuge system.
- Some participants were attracted by the prospect of working in Government, specifically what they thought to be strong legal protections and advancement for PWD and PWTD.
- Participants had a lack of knowledge regarding basic concepts related to the Schedule A hiring authority, and they mentioned that this lack of knowledge was widespread. They perceived that their supervisors did not have answers, and that guidance and advice was inconsistent, varying depending on the person helping.
- Participants had a lack of clarity about how Schedule A was used in the recruitment and selection process. They were also unclear about probationary periods and advantages and disadvantages of Schedule A as they sought career growth.
- Some participants expressed fear of using special hiring authorities as they felt their ability to be accepted as fully capable employees and opportunities for advancement would be compromised.

Onboarding

- Most participants initially felt welcomed in their workplaces. However, a couple of participants signaled that they were no longer in welcoming work environments.
- There were significant onboarding issues that did not have a direct link to having a disability. For example, miscommunication about hiring decisions and start dates.
- Most participants were not provided structured onboarding support. Some participants described themselves as lucky to have had one person that they could rely on or go to for questions. A couple of participants reported that they have taken it upon themselves to be the person that trains and welcomes new employees.
- There seemed to be no consistency in discussing accommodations prior to the employee's start date. Some participants were onboarded with needed accommodations available to them immediately. Other participants were forced to request needed accommodations multiple times and wait an extended period to have the request fulfilled.
- Some participants indicated that the lack of sufficient onboarding resulted in them not having information for whom they might be able to contact if they have questions or issues related to their disability and/or reasonable accommodations.

Culture & Climate

- Participants described work environments where disabilities are looked down upon. They described environments where supervisors and peers act towards individuals with disabilities as if they had a choice regarding their disability. More focus is placed on the disability than on the abilities.
- Participants described workplaces in which a reasonable accommodation was perceived as an inability to carry out job duties. Some participants describe an environment where they are perceived as lazy and "as a burden." Several were made to feel like the cost of the reasonable accommodation(s) was excessive, when in reality it was not a financial burden to the work unit.

Reasonable Accommodation & Career Development

- Several participants suspected they had been passed over for promotions they were qualified for because of their disability. A participant, when talking about this, expressed the following: "I am not unreliable because I am different."
- The National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) is described as a hard place to get to, and to navigate once there, for persons with certain disabilities. Participants wondered if more local training could be available. Even when participants had the opportunity to be teleconferenced into a training at NCTC, they felt a lack of careful planning to ensure they could be engaged with trainers and other participants and achieve growth in a meaningful way.
- Participants described a culture of systemic bias. One participant described it as "the friends and family bias." According to them, hiring managers and/or those who influence them, resist considering the entire certificate of eligible candidates and are only looking for names they want to see. Participants said decision makers will exaggerate to try to justify that some people are not qualified enough, even if Human Resources staff deemed them qualified. Participants described a "good ole' boys club" environment. If you are not in the group, you don't get opportunities.

Barrier Elimination

Communications

Description of the Problem to be Addressed

The Service has a history of inconsistent and disconnected communications regarding Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) strategy, initiatives and core values. Such disconnected initiatives inhibit Service-wide understanding and buy-in of D&I as integral to our culture and our effectiveness as a conservation agency relevant to the public. Internally, a segment of the employee population (minorities) is less likely than white employees to agree that D&I is supported by the Service, which enhances the perception of disconnect. This year the Service Directorate continued discussions regarding D&I messaging to support the rollout of the updated Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan for 2020-2024.

Key Results

- During the BAT's initial workshop, BAT members assessed current perceptions of D&I communications and identified this as an area where the Service needs improvement -mostly reiterating findings by the FY 2018 BAT.
- The BAT determined that before employees were inundated with talking points about each area of the D&I umbrella, Service leadership needed to be aligned on the basics of why we need D&I, how we are going to get there, and what success will look like.
- The BAT participated in the crafting of high-level messages explaining the why, what, how and when of the Service's approach to D&I. These align with the discussions that took place among the four Directorate work groups in November 2019. These high-level messages are the starting point for an adapted Service-wide discussion on D&I.
- Each Region and Program has submitted a communication plan outlining how they plan to roll out the new "why, what, how" D&I messages.

Communication Plan and D&I Messages

On November 14, 2019, the Directorate and Deputies Group allotted time to develop messaging to promote consistent and meaningful D&I communication by Service leadership. Directorate members recognized the importance of demonstrating the Service's commitment to cultural change to ensure our workplace is diverse and inclusive. Discussion revolved around answering the following questions:

- 1) Why is a diverse and inclusive workplace important to the Service?
- 2) What will the Service's D&I efforts be focused on?
- 3) How will the Service use its existing initiatives to support this effort?
- 4) When will the Service know it has been successful?

The outcome was a list of recommended key messages and next steps from the BAT which were used by the EDC and External Affairs to develop a focused communications plan with top-line, consistent, and succinct messaging from leadership to emphasize the importance of D&I as integral to our workplace strategy and clarify how various workforce and D&I initiatives related to one another. The Directorate has since tasked each Regional Director and Assistant Director to step down these core messages, with the intent to adapt extended messaging to various audiences in concert with their employment life cycle status (recruitment, hiring, onboarding/development, and engagement/retention). All audiences are invited to become actively involved in and to be aware of their collective role in furthering D&I efforts.

The goals for the FY2020 communication plan are:

- 1) Create a shared vision for what it means to have a diverse and inclusive organization and provide a clear directive on how we are going to get there;
- 2) Distinguish this new unified, singularly-focused approach from previous disjointed efforts;
- 3) Establish a sense of urgency around meeting employee expectations for a workplace free of harassment, where different perspectives are valued and all employees are treated with dignity and respect; and,
- 4) Create two-way communication channels to manage and address concerns and challenges.

The overall key messages for the FY2020 communication plan are:

- Why is a diverse and inclusive workplace important to the Service?
 - We are better for it when our decisions are informed by a diversity of thought, our perspectives reflect the public we serve, and our employees reach their full potential.
- What does success look like?
 - We aspire to be a workplace where each individual is treated with dignity and respect and feels valued and empowered during every step of their journey with us.
- How will the Service achieve success?
 - We will engage with our employees, remove barriers, improve recruitment and hiring practices, and support employee development.

Recommended next steps:

- Continue to support the implementation of consistent D&I activities Service-wide, including developing a “game plan” of national planned activities and communications for FY 21 that the regions and programs can use to complement / plan their activities around.
 - Identify successful actions that have been taken at the Region/Program level as part of their communication plans and include no more than two total for Service-wide implementation in FY 2021.
- Increase capacity to support facilitation of open dialogue / high-sensitivity D&I discussions among Service leaders and employees.

- PWD Barrier: In FY 2021, communication plan talking points distributed by the EDC should go a step further and focus on succinct talking points that:
 - Speak to PWD directly and with transparency about what the data says about their experience.
 - Explain how improvement of their experience fits within the DIIP Work Plan.
 - Outline the actions that improve the knowledge barrier (e.g. reinforce information on Reasonable Accommodations points of contact, access to RA training).

Employee Resource Groups

Description of the Problem to be Addressed

Employee retention for women and minorities remains a prevalent challenge for the Service. ERGs are employee-led groups with members who are drawn together by a common interest and/or identity and work towards advancing relevancy, diversity, and inclusion throughout the organization. ERGs are a tool that many organizations have found to be effective in helping to foster an inclusive work culture, which can contribute to raising retention rates. A literature review on the benefits of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and how an ERG strategy can be implemented in the FWS was conducted by the BAT. While the Department of the Interior (DOI) has made progress towards encouraging participation in ERGs, FWS has made minimal concerted efforts to encourage participation in existing ERGs or formation of new ERGs. DOI released Personnel Bulletin 17-07 in 2017 to provide policy, standards, and procedures for recognition of ERGs. The policy lays out the requirements of ERGs, including establishing a charter with specific goals and objectives the group aims to achieve and identifying a leadership liaison who provides advice and counsel to guide the group's development and keeps the group focused on organizational goals. ERGs can serve as sounding boards around strategic diversity and inclusion matters for leadership, and they can provide a critical support system that offers employees a sense of community, camaraderie, and connection to the organization. They can also help introduce new employees to FWS culture, and foster employee engagement and satisfaction. Additionally, ERGs can be a source of mentoring, educational and professional development. To capitalize on their many benefits, the BAT recommends that the FWS develop a strategy for employee engagement with ERGs.

Key Results

- 1) A review of the literature strongly supports the notion that participation in ERGs results in positive outcomes for employees. A number of studies confirm that participation in ERGs is associated with improved feelings of social inclusion and sense of community (Baker 2009; Beaver 2018; Colgan & McKearney 2012; Dennissen et al. 2016; Friedman et al. 1998; Friedman 1999; Githens & Aragorn 2009; Helfgott 2000; McDevitt-Pugh 2010; Raeburn 2004; Scully & Segal 2002; Singh et al. 2006; and Van Aken et al. 1994). In many cases, ERGs have been instrumental in achieving concrete improvements to workplace conditions (e.g., achieving domestic partnership benefits) and have thereby helped management address issues related to diversity (Briscoe & Safford 2008; Briscoe & Safford 2010; Creed & Scully 2000; Githens & Aragorn 2009; Scully 2009; Singh et al. 2006; Van Aken et al. 1994).

- 2) A review of the literature provides support for the notion that ERGs increase employee performance (McDevitt-Pugh 2010; Randel & Ranft 2007; Ward 2012), recruitment (McDevitt-Pugh 2010; Scully & Segal 2002) and retention (Friedman & Holtom 2002; Ward 2012). One study indicated that ERGs were not successful in improving retention when management was fearful of and not fully supportive of ERGs (Helfgott 2000).
- 3) Based on a review of existing literature, there are some potential pitfalls that can occur with ERG implementation (Bye 2003). If the FWS is going to realize the benefits of ERGs while avoiding the pitfalls, there are established best practices to consider in designing and implementing ERGs, particularly in the areas of up-front planning, setting expectations and operational support.
- 4) ERGs are most likely to be successful at achieving organizational goals when they receive strong organizational support (e.g., identifying a senior-level liaison for each ERG, encouraging staff to spend a prescribed amount of work time on ERG activities, providing support for an ERG coordinator position, clearly communicating support from leadership, etc).

Recommended next steps:

- Prepare a national ERG Initiative to be rolled out in FY 2021. Activities to include: review existing policy/guidance (DOI PB 17-07), seek input from existing DOI ERG programs in other Bureaus, and develop guidance for FWS employees who wish to start an ERG, among others.
- Ensure ERG strategy is visibly supported by leadership while remaining a grassroots employee-led effort.
- Involve ERG members in events surrounding commemorative heritage events/months from the start of the ERG effort (the FWS Pride ERG is already taking a lead role in developing content for the June 2020 Pride Month commemoration).
- Create a toolkit for future ERGs with at least three items: 1) DOI ERG Guidance 2) the Service ERG strategy, and 3) a sample charter/bylaws document.
- Establish a vehicle for virtual information and best practice sharing between Service ERGs.

Enhanced Training/Accountability

Description of the Problem to be Addressed

The larger team identified the need for a method to track accountability for the Service's Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan (DIIP) as well as the need to identify training focused on D&I themes and resources. The sub-team focused on current trainings offered for D&I exclusively as well as trainings that incorporate D&I components within a broader training.

Key Results

- 1) The accountability tracking mechanism was created in the late summer to meet the directorate's need.

- 2) The team identified 33 Diversity and Inclusion Training offerings currently provided through the Service. Additionally, each region provides differing levels of D&I trainings, some specific to the area, some based on whether the region has a Leadership and Employee Engagement Specialist. Typically, the Leadership and Employee Engagement Specialists conduct, or coordinate D&I training offers locally.
- 3) Some regions provide trainings through private vendors, such as Franklin Covey. These also vary by region, based on the local investment into these trainings as well as if there is a local Leadership and Employee Engagement Specialist.

Recommended next steps:

- Increase access and awareness of available training by developing a single repository for all D&I training, as well as utilizing the new intranet.
 - More clearly define for employees how a course qualifies for EEO versus D&I training.
- Develop Service-specific training on interrupting bias. Old-format sensitivity-type trainings are unlikely to work and can make matters worse. The Service should pilot and measure the impact of new approaches to training on interrupting bias and improving our collective inclusiveness intelligence.
- Develop Service-specific training on disability rights and responsibilities for supervisors and employees.
- Improve D&I training impact assessment. In the current state, the Service is mostly measuring attendance, compliance, satisfaction, and reaction. The next step is to measure how much information was absorbed and how much training has influenced the behavior of participants on the job.

Employee Onboarding

Onboarding is identified as an area of improvement needed for the Service. Onboarding is an integral part of the employee lifecycle. During this period, the employee integrates into the workplace. Optimal onboarding results in new employees being orientated into the organization, understanding the workplace culture and office norms, adopting the Service mission as their own and lays the foundation for successful future work. Managers are a critical stakeholder in the onboarding process through the setting expectations, sharing of work styles, puts the employee on the path for successful for work. The process of onboarding and integration is a necessary time commitment for mangers of new employees.

Key results:

- During the BAT's initial workshop in May 2019, the team identified lack of a national onboarding protocol or centralized platform for employee integration resources as a limiting factor to new employee engagement and retention.

- The BAT worked with the Deputies Group, the JAO and NCTC to develop a checklist of helpful resources for new employees and hiring managers and outline next steps in developing a national employee onboarding platform as identified in the FY 2020 DIIP Work Plan.
 - The Employee Onboarding & Integration Project team has since developed a project plan to produce high quality deliverables to complement our current recruitment, hiring and retention practices.
 - This team is also compiling all previous onboarding projects to date; including ones that the BAT has helped work on as part of their team efforts.

Recommended next steps:

- Continue to work with the Deputies Group, the JAO and NCTC to develop a platform to host helpful onboarding resources for new employees and hiring managers.
- Expand platform over time to include resources for all aspects of the employee engagement lifecycle (recruit, hire, onboard/develop, engage/retain).
- Hold focus groups or conduct a survey of converted DFP Fellows, Schedule A hires, and general subsection of new employees at their 6-month mark and one year anniversary in order to glean fresh information on improvements to our onboarding practices.
- Review exit interview surveys to see if issues raised during separations can be addressed during the employees' initial onboarding experience.

Conclusion

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is at its best when our decisions are informed by a diversity of thought, our perspectives reflect the public we serve, and our employees reach their full potential. The FY 2019 BAT made progress towards achieving this vision by implementing previous recommendations and developing strategies for barrier elimination, focusing on communications, employee resource groups (ERGs), training, and onboarding. The BAT maximized efficiency by working in collaboration with others in the Service that may be working on similar or overlapping projects.

In addition to corroborating previously identified barriers, the FY 2019 BAT identified an additional barrier: insufficient knowledge among workforce regarding concepts relevant to supporting Persons with Disabilities (PWD). The workforce has insufficient knowledge in fundamental concepts related to the hiring, development, and retention of PWD, such as the Schedule A hiring authority and reasonable accommodations. This, along with deficiencies in other employee life cycle areas that affect all employees, such as onboarding, is leading to employees with disabilities feeling like they are not valued.

The BAT prioritized recommendations in two areas: Communications and the Exit Survey. The BAT considers action items in those areas to be high impact. In FY 2020, the Service launched its first concerted effort around D&I communications. As a result, each Region and Program generated their own communication action plan including D&I and employee engagement activities. However, one communications push alone will not significantly transform D&I communications nor will it transform our work culture. The BAT recommends the Service stay the course on improving communications with

the ultimate goal of achieving national coordination and increased guidance to Regions/Programs around D&I activities and communications. An incremental phased approach is the best way to get there.

The framework for a new course of action was established by the Diversity and Inclusion Implementation Plan, FY 2020-2024 (DIIP) issued in October of this year. A cornerstone of the DIIP is an annual call to action; one which will set current-year expectations across the organization for messaging, coordinated action, and accountability. Therefore, the BAT recommends the Service roll out a phase two of its communications template to the Regions/Programs as part of the FY 2021 DIIP Work Plan.

The FWS workforce of the future will be shaped by who applies for positions, who is hired, who is retained, and who remains engaged. While we are currently not meeting numerous CLF benchmarks for women, and several racial and ethnic minority groups, and persons with disabilities; there is great potential for eventually reaching these benchmarks if we continue to push forward assertively with all aspects of barrier elimination.

Supplemental Documents

Additional in-depth analysis of workforce data tables, the Federal Employee Viewpoints (FEVS), the Service's Exit Survey, and other data sources have been assembled into a Supplemental Documents section. To request a copy of the Supplemental Documents, please contact ODIWM via e-mail at: odiwm@fws.gov.